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The "Flip Side" of Peter the Great's Reforms

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Abstract: Under discussion the question if Peter the Great's reforms were truly revolutionary. The author focuses on two aspects: the extent to which his innovations altered the patrimonial system that had dominated Muscovy over the previous three centuries, and the role arbitrariness, bribery, embezzlement and other kinds of corruption played during his reign. She examines the first Russian emperor's changes that most affected Russia's various estates, including the introduction of a poll tax, the conversion of peasants on state lands into state serfs, as well as the intensification of the nobility's service obligations and the reduction of its privileges. The author concludes that Peter not only did not destroy Muscovy's traditional patrimonial system, but intensified it and even used it to impose his reforms on a reluctant population. Meanwhile, although the emperor's initiatives in the sciences, arts and secular education were important, they only affected the upper class. In other respects, Peter's efforts to westernize his realm were only superficial. The author also considers how Russians regarded the notion of "freedom." She argues that there is a connection between seemingly opposite phenomena – the popular desire for freedom and arbitrariness of the service nobility. The author pays particular attention to corruption, which she considers to have had a major impact on the government's relationship with the elite, and was tolerated both to maintain the latter's loyalty but also to manipulate it.

Keywords: Peter I, Peter the Great, sociocultural patrimonial structure, Europeanization of Russia, freedom, arbitrariness, corruption

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«Обратная сторона» петровских реформ

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Аннотация: Рассмотрен вопрос о «революционности» преобразований Петра I. В центре внимания автора находятся два вопроса: насколько изменился присущий Московскому государству XV–XVII вв. социокультурный вотчинный уклад под воздействием реформ Петра I и какую роль играли в петровское время произвол, взятки, казнокрадство и другие проявления коррупции. В статье рассмотрены наиболее значимые для социального статуса различных русских сословий преобразования первого русского императора: введение подушной подати и расширение в свете этого крепостного права вглубь и вширь за счет появления новых категорий крепостных крестьян, превращения черносошных крестьян в крепостных государства; интенсификация дворянской службы и сокращение землевладельческих привилегий дворянства по указу о единонаследии 1714 г. Автор приходит к выводу о том, что социальная политика Петра I не вела к разрушению социокультурного вотчинного уклада, свойственного Московскому государству в XV–XVII вв. Более того, вотчинный уклад в царствование Петра I достиг своего исторического

апогея, что было одним из главных причин успешного внедрения в русскую жизнь разнообразных начинаний царя, встречающих значительное недовольство. Анализируя европеизацию (вестернизацию) в петровскую эпоху, автор приходит к выводу, что глубинный смысл, работающий на внутреннюю модернизацию страны, имели только начинания в области науки, высокого искусства и светского образования для шляхетского сословия. В остальном петровская европеизация была поверхностным подражанием. Затронут также вопрос о такой ментальной категории русского сознания, как «воля». Показана связь, казалось бы, противоположных явлений – народного стремления к воле и произвола служилых людей. В статье изучается коррупция петровского времени, которая рассматривается как одна из системообразующих основ во взаимоотношениях царской власти и социально-политической элиты, допускаемой как средство поддержания лояльности элиты, и способы манипулирования ею.

Ключевые слова: Петр I, Петр Великий, вотчинный социокультурный уклад, европеизация России, воля, произвол, коррупция

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Introduction

Historians have paid much attention to the positive aspects of Peter the Great's reforms. Even critics have seen the emperor's raising Russia to the status of a great power after the Great Northern War with Sweden in a positive light. Meanwhile, most also agree that he revolutionized social and political life in his realm. According to Aleksandr Kiesewetter, a prominent early 20th century historian:

> One could see a great historical cataclysm, which at once summed old "Muscovy's" history and strongly predetermined the whole future of our economic life.[1]

Soviet historians debated whether they could agree with Sergei Solovev when he called Peter the Great "a revolutionary on the throne?"[2]

Although few dispute that Russia was among Europe's great powers by the end of the emperor's reign in 1725, they are less certain about whether his reforms were truly "revolutionary." While they clearly introduced major changes, these transformations also had a "flip side." First, they did not affect Russia's patrimonial social structure. Second, during Peter's reign, the extent of corruption at all levels of government was much higher than under earlier tsars. Most important, the fact that such venality reached the highest political levels can hardly be seen positively.

A look at the Petrine era's "flip side" is particularly relevant, since it enables us to consider the consequences of the reforms imposed by the autocracy and rejected by various elements of the population. The purpose of the article is to reconstruct and analyze the results of the transformations, which will reveal the ambiguity and complexity of these years of change, as well as the reasons why Russia's modernization proved to be incomplete.

This article will address the following questions:

– to what extent did Peter the Great's reforms in the social sphere strengthen (or destroy) Muscovy's patrimonial system, i.e. the status of the sovereign as owner of all the lands and resources of his realm, and who dealt with his subjects of all classes as serfs?

– why were the institutions Peter created to punish arbitrariness, embezzlement and bribery ineffective.

[1] *Petr Velikiy: pro et contra. Lichnost' i deyaniya Petra I v otsenke russkikh mysliteley i issledovateley* (St. Petersburg: RKHGI Publ., 2003), 640.

[2] N.L. Rubinshteyn, *Russkaya istoriografiya* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat Publ., 1941). 326; N.Ya. Eydel'man, "Petrovskiy period," in Eydel'man N.YA. *'Revolyutsiya sverkhu' v Rossii* (Moscow: Kniga Publ., 1989), 68–73.

The sources include legislation at the end of the 17th – first quarter of the 18th centuries (especially those reflecting Peter's social policy), the records of various bodies, including the institutions of fiscal supervision and secret police, as well as the notes of Russian and foreign contemporaries and their immediate descendants, such as B.I. Kurakin, P.P. Shafirov, I.I. Golikov, F.W. Bergholz, I.N. Boltin, N.A. Lvov and others.

Peter the Great's Reforms and Russia's Patrimonial System

Peter the Great's social transformations had a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, they undoubtedly laid the preconditions for a genuine Europeanization of Russia's social elite. On the other, the bulk of the population never emerged from the medieval impotence of serfdom.

This is obvious from looking at the nature of Peter the Great's Westernization. This Europeanization was a new stage in the process that began with the creation of a single Russian state during the reign of Ivan III and continued through the next two centuries. Largely superficial, it consisted of borrowing various Western European military, technical and cultural innovations. At the same time, the Muscovite state and church imposed a strict barrier on direct interaction between Russians and the West.

During the Troubles at the turn of the 17th century, False Dmitry I, and to a certain extent Boris Godunov before him, tried to breach this intellectual iron curtain, a process that continued on its own through Tsarevna Sophia's regency in the 1680s. Peter became a truly independent ruler only in 1695 after his mother's death, and he immediately came to prominence by decisive military and diplomatic moves, such as the Azov campaigns of 1695–1696 and the Grand Embassy of 1697–1698. At that time, his almost childish admiration for Western Europe, generated by what he had seen in Moscow's German Quarter, grew into a desire to make Europeanizing Russia the core of his policy.

As Russia's sovereign, Peter destroyed the socio-cultural barrier on communication between Russians and foreigners. It looked like a real revolution. But was the "Revolution of Peter the Great" really so significant?

By forcing the nobility to get a secular education at home or abroad, the tsar laid the foundation for the intellectual modernization of the elite. The Great Northern War of 1700–1721 made it necessary to complete creating a regular, professional army, which the first Romanovs had begun. Military needs also stimulated the growth of industry and foreign trade, which, in part, laid the foundations for modernizing the economy, as well as society as a whole.

But did it abolish the patrimonial system? Despite all the external social and political changes, it did not undergo a radical restructuring. Moreover, it was the patrimonial service structure of the Russian state that allowed Peter to overcome popular discontent caused by labor conscription, increased taxes and obligations to the state, and the expansion of serfdom, with relative ease. The old Muscovite traditions of service people (*sluzhilye lyudi*) helped intensify their obligations, while beginning in 1714 the privileges of the landed nobility were reduced. Meanwhile, the state imposed obligatory styles in fashions, hair and architecture, how to harvest rye, what kind of sheep to keep, etc. The tsar did not seek the opinions of the estates, which, moreover, did not have any corporate institutions to express or protect their interests. Therefore, he did not need to maneuver between various strata of the social elite.

This situation was natural for patrimonial states, but it was fundamentally different from Western European political systems, both medieval and of early modern times. Compared to the traditional Muscovite order, Peter strengthened the patrimonial state,

which reached its historical climax during his reign. K.S. Aksakov rightly claimed that the tsar imposed "the yoke of the state over the land."[3] Like all Slavophiles, Aksakov idealized the pre-Petrine order and mistakenly believed that popular political representation through the *zemskiy sobor* (assembly of the land), which had met regularly during the early years of the new Romanov dynasty, had taken place throughout the entire Muscovite period. As a result, he did not understand the direct link between the socio-political structure of Peter's Russia and that of Muscovy over the previous three hundred years.

Russia's patrimonial system had always been based on the monarch's personal rule. Peter the Great was charismatic and no less decisive than Ivan the Terrible, and like the latter, he was inclined to impose solutions by force on recalcitrant subjects. "The beginning of Peter's glorious days was overshadowed by revolts and executions," Aleksandr Pushkin noted. The tsar's executions helped him completely to suppress the armed uprisings of the Streltsy, the Don Cossacks, the townspeople of Astrakhan, and the Bashkir rebels. And as they fled into the woods, the Old Believers also lost their political role, not to mention having to pay higher taxes than Orthodox subjects.

The patrimonial system's preservation by Peter is evident from looking at the changes in the status of all Russian estates during his reign. In the countryside, the tsar's efforts to expand serfdom contradicted the very essence of modernization. After introducing the capitation tax in 1724, more than 90% of the peasantry became serfs. The only exception was a small layer of smallholders, but, in addition to labor conscription, they also had to carry out regular military service. Peter also now permitted the sale of serfs without land, thereby practically reducing them to slaves. Meanwhile, by transferring ownership of church lands to the state, many former monastic serfs now became bound to the civilian government, which tended to be more exacting.

The poll tax placed an additional burden on new state serfs, who now, along with paying 74 kopeks per capita, were also subject to the same quitrent of 40 kopeks due from privately owned serfs. The tsar also continued the practice of transfering ownership of peasants on state lands to many "fledglings from Peter's nest," as they joined the landowning nobility. Thus, one of his favorites, Prince Aleksander Menshikov, received 100 000 serfs, thereby joining Count Boris Sheremetev and Prince Aleksei Cherkasskii among the ranks of the tsar's richest subjects.

However, the privileges of such new favorites, as well as those of the old nobility, were precariously subject to the monarch's favor, as many discovered both during Peter's reign and during the era of palace coups that followed him. Despite the abolition of *mestnichestvo* (order of seniority) as a system of collective family responsibility in 1682, relatives of those who had fallen into disfavor could also find themselves dispossessed. The many disgraced grandees who were sent to the gallows or banished into exile included Princes Vasilii Golitsyn and Matvei Gagarin, Aleksei Nesterov, Baron Petr Shafirov, Aleksei Kurbatov, and after his reign – A.M. Divier, Counts Menshikov, Anton de Viera, Andrei Ostermann, Khristofor von Münnich, some Princes Dolgorukov, and many others.

With regard to the nobility as a whole, under Peter the Great its landlord rights were reduced in comparison to earlier reigns. Contrary to the definitions of school textbooks, from the 15th to the 17th centuries, Russian nobles did not unconditionally own their land. However, any owner of an ancestral estate could legally dispose of it, sell, donate, or mortgage it at his discretion, as well as dividing it among his heirs. When the sove-

[3] N.I. Tsimbayev, *Slavyanofil'stvo (iz istorii russkoy obshchestvenno-politicheskoy mysli XIX veka)* (Moscow: MGU Publ., 1986), 195.

reign seized an estate, unless its owner had fallen into disgrace, he was generally compensated with another one. The latter situation was certainly worse, as the law, including the Cathedral Code of 1649, did not allow bequeathing, dividing, donating, selling, or mortgaging estates. A person who was dismissed for being unfit for service was given only a part of the former estate to live on, in contrast to his patrimony. Widows of a nobleman and his young offspring were subject to the same fate. However, when the sons of nobles became eligible for state service at the age of 15, they had the right to a new estate. In addition, during the reign of Aleksei Mikhailovich and Fedor Alekseevich, noblemen were allowed to exchange estates among themselves by mutual consent.

Peter's decree on primogeniture of 1714 abolished the connection between the duty of Russian noblemen to lifelong service to the sovereign and their right to own land, whether as estates, or less often, patrimony. The resulting merger of estates and ancestral lands into one form of noble landownership not only did not increase the nobility's privileges but actually curtailed them. Now the owners of ancestral estates lost their former rights freely to dispose of the patrimony, the sale and mortgage of all noble estates were forbidden, and inheritance rights were curtailed. Fathers could bequeath the estate and serfs to only one heir, and the rest of the male children were to be content with monetary salaries for their service. Moreover, the decree emphasized that this was done not to prevent anyone from evading service, but to increase their desire to carry it out. Given the constant presence of noblemen in the military and civil institutions, the abolition of estates for service, untimely payment of salaries, which were low by Western standards, and growing competition with the new personal and hereditary noblemen according to the Table of Ranks of 1722, the position of Russian nobles hardly improved.

The increased official duties of noblemen combined with reduced privileges, the fall in the social status of peasants, the imposition of state service on merchants and townsmen in addition to constantly rising confirms the views of 19th century scholars that Peter's reforms led to the "enslavement of all estates".

This was in sharp contrast to the West, where the old estate structure steadily disintegrated and the rising bourgeoisie, whose economic interests were also defended, joined the nobility in supporting the monarch. Although Peter successfully copied many of the institutions of West European absolutism, the social structure of his empire was very different. Peter's absolutism was based on his right as sovereign to be the supreme owner of the land and all its resources, whereas Western European absolutism stemmed from the monarch's constant maneuvering between the interests of the first and second estates and the rising bourgeoisie. Thus, the famous phrase attributed to the French "Sun King," Louis XIV: "L'État c'est moi" ("I am the State") is much better suited to Russian Tsar Peter the Great.

Peter the Great acknowledged that his methods of rule were different from those in the rest of Europe. According to contemporaries, he declared:

> With other European nations, one can achieve the goal by benevolent means, but with Russians it is not so. Had I not been strict, I would not have ruled Russia for long, nor would I have made it what it is now. I deal not with people, but with animals that I want to transform into people.[4]

The dissonance between Peter the Great's European aspirations and his non-European methods obligates us to look at his goals when reforming Russia.

[4] *Petr I v yego izrecheniyakh. Reprint s izdaniya 1910 g.* (Moscow: Ladomir Publ., 1994), 111.

The Contradictions of Peter the Great's Ideology

Peter the Great's enslavement of all estates drove his military and diplomatic goals. At the same time, the tsar carried his reforms out according to a Westernizing rhetoric, which sharply distinguished it from the ideology of his predecessors.

Two opposing principles merged dialectically in Peter's mind. On the one hand, there was the right of the sovereign to his patrimony, which he intuitively adopted to determine the national interests of the country himself and deny society the right to have any interests other than serving the supreme power. On the other hand, after his return from the Grand Embassy, he adopted the Western European idea of the state as an instrument designed to realize the highest public good. The former was as a medieval religious and ideological mental axiom, while the latter was the result of the rational component of the monarch's consciousness.

According to the ideology of the European Enlightenment, the absolute monarch was the fatherland's first servant. It is this role that Peter the Great voiced his speech to his troops on the eve of the Battle of Poltava on 27 June 1709:

> The Russian army got to know that the hour had come, that the whole Fatherland was in their hands: Russia either would perish, or would be at its best... And they would think that they fought not for Peter the Great, but for the state entrusted to him, for their kindred, for the Russian nation. They knew that Peter valued Russia, its piety, glory and prosperity more than his own life.[5]

Perhaps Anisimov was right when he suggested that Peter the Great never said those words, at least not on the eve of that decisive victory.[6] There is no mention of any speech in the entry in the "Journal or Daily Note" that describes the tsar's actions at Poltava.[7] The text more likely first appeared in the history of Russia up to 1709 that is believed to have been written by the Kiev Theological Academy professor Feofan Prokopovich.[8] He had attracted Peter's attention with his brilliant eulogy in honor of the victory in the Battle of Poltava, which led to the professor's becoming the tsar's main propagandist.

But the very moment of making this speech and its authorship are unimportant. Of significance is the fact that this was the monarch's duty according to the state ideology of the day. It was according to this perspective that Russia's first newspaper, *Vedomosti*, described Peter's activities; the rhetoric of his decrees was in this spirit; and the tsar himself tirelessly reminded his subjects that he considered himself to the first servant of the state.

Peter's leading associates and publicists shared this European Enlightenment view. Through the pathos of Prokopovich's panegyrics and Shafirov's work on the causes the Great Northern War,[9] two editions of *The Book of Military Affairs*, as well as in the engravings and texts that glorified the Russian army's exploits during the Great

[5] N.I. Pavlenko, *Petr Pervyy i yego vremya* (Moscow: Prosveshcheniye Publ., 1983), 67.

[6] Ye.V. Anisimov, "The Myth of Great Victoria: Poltava in Russian consciousness and collective memory," *Rodina*, no. 7 (2009): 50–55.

[7] *Zhurnal ili Podennaya zapiska, blazhennyya i vechnodostoynyya pamyati gosudarya imperatora Petra Velikago s 1698 goda, dazhe do zaklyucheniya Neyshtatskago mira* (St. Petersburg: Pri Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk Publ., 1770–1772), 210–215.

[8] *Podrobnaya letopis' ot nachala Rossii do Poltavskoy Batalii* (St. Petersburg: Pechatano u I.K. Shnora Publ., 1779).

[9] P.P. Shafirov, *Rassuzhdeniye, kakiye zakonnyye prichiny yego Tsarskoye Velichestvo Petr Pervyy, tsar' i povelitel' vserossiyskiy, …k nachatiyu voyny protiv korolya Karola 12, shvedskogo 1700 godu imel…* (St. Petesburg: [B.i.], 2017).

Northern War, the postulates formulated in the Poltava speech guided the official ideology of Europeanized Russia. These notions were canonized by the historians I.I. Golikov and P.N. Kreshkin during the second half of the 18th century.

Peter's loyalty to the Enlightenment understanding of his civic duty accompanied him throughout his adult life (with the exception of two episodes of cowardice[10]). Neither his contemporaries nor descendants doubted the readiness of the tsar for self-sacrifice in the name of the state. For Russia's enlightened monarchy, as Catherine II understood it, Peter became a reference point, which was symbolically expressed in the Bronze Horseman she commissioned with the telling inscription on the pedestal: "Catherine II to Peter I." The figure of the tsar-reformer made no less of an impression on Voltaire, the "uncrowned king" of Enlightened Europe. In his history of the reign of Peter the Great, the *philosphe* presented the Russian emperor as almost the ideal of a progressive European ruler, who, as the first servant of the fatherland, stood above his opponent Charles XII.

However, the ethos of the patrimonial ruler prevented Peter the Great from understanding the other side of the European idea of an enlightened absolute monarchy, which considers society to be an equal partner of the state. The legacy of medieval Muscovy's politics, based as it was on paternalism as an ideal, prompted the tsar, as the "father of the fatherland," to view the gentry and other estates as nothing more than his servants, whose duty was uncomplaining submission. It is no coincidence that Peter considered Ivan the Terrible, rather than some enlightened monarch of Europe, to be the ideal ruler.

The *Diary* of F.V. Bergholtz, a general who had emigrated from Holstein, described a telling anecdote. After a lengthy career in Russia, he returned to his native land in 1721 and served as a *kamer yunker* (groom of the chamber) to Duke Karl Friedrich, who was then courting Peter's eldest daughter, Anna. In January 1722, Peter arrived in Moscow to celebrate the Treaty of Nystad that ended the Swedish war. As part of the festivities, the duke built an arch decorated with portraits of Tsar Ivan the Terrible with the inscription "Incepit" (began) and that for Peter with "Perfecit" (improved). Pleased with the analogy, Peter said:

> This Tsar (pointing to Tsar Ivan the Terrible) is my predecessor and example. I have always considered him as a model for courage; but I could not yet equal him. Only fools who do not know the circumstances of his time, the characteristics of his people and his great merits call him a tyrant.[11]

One cannot help but agree with Kliuchevskii's remark:

> The reform of Peter the Great was a struggle of despotism with the people, with its inertia. He expected his autocratic power to foster initiative among his enslaved subjects and, through the slave-owning nobility, establish European science in Russia and public education as a necessary condition for the public's enterprise; he wanted a slave, while remaining a slave, to act consciously and freely. The combination of despotism and freedom, enlightenment and slavery, is a political squaring of the circle, a mystery that has been addressed in our country since the time of Peter the Great for two centuries and has yet to be solved.[12]

However, Klyuchevskii's "combination of despotism and freedom" better describes the reigns of Catherine II and Alexander I. It is hard to detect any freedom among Peter's subjects. The concept of the public good is rarely found in his laws, but as its ana-

[10] Reckless flight to the Trinity-Sergius Monastery after receiving a false rumor on August 8, 1689 about the movement of Sophia's troops to Preobrazhenskoye and the abandonment of the army near Narva in November 1700 to its own devices when news of the landing of the Swedish landing party.

[11] Ye.V. Anisimov, *Petr Velikiy lichnost' i reforma* (St. Petersburg: Piter Publ., 2009), 11.

[12] V.O. Klyuchevskiy, *Sochineniya v 9-ti tomakh* (Moscow: Mysl' Publ., 1988), 203.

logue the word-combination "good order" often appears. The tsar explained that his subjects poorly observe it or strive to violate it: "...there is a custom – the damned snitches spoil all decrees with their inventions."[13]

In Peter the Great's thought and actions, war was the main means of ensuring the good of the state. This view was held by all rulers, from those of Antiquity to the enlightened monarchs of 18th century Europe. In the early modern era the West's elite fully shared this view, giving priority to military service and believing in the moral duty of men, as, above all, soldiers. Peter's guiding ambition to see Russia in the club of great powers was also shared by his European contemporaries.

At the same time, Peter's obsession with war was based not only on European ideas, but also on the peculiarities of Muscovy's rise as a united and independent state. Without the necessary socio-economic foundation for centralization coming from below, by the 15th and 16th centuries unity through military coercion by the ruler in the face of real and imagined external enemies, was the principal tool for establishing the Tsardom of Russia. Muscovy's rapid territorial growth, increasing resources and more subjects to conscript for labor compensated for its poverty, and allowed the patrimonial monarch to concentrate ever greater revenues, which, in turn, boosted his military strength. It ensured Russia's eastward colonization and allowed it to survive in the face of its more advanced western neighbors.

Like the tsars who came before him, Peter saw the growth his territory as the main instrument for ensuring "the common good and profit." In his speech of 22 October 1721 on the occasion of the conclusion of the Treaty of Nystadt, the emperor declared: "...we must work for the common good and profit, through which the people's life will be easier."[14]

Peter the Great's Incomplete Modernization

From the distant perspective of the 21st century, we can also see that Russia's national interests consisted not in turning it into a great European power through war and diplomacy, but by modernizing the country to overcome its medieval backwardness in relation to the West. This was not a task that Peter solved, and his military needs only promoted surrogate forms of Europeanization, while hindering the development of more thoroughgoing modernization, especially in aligning the state's understanding of the common good with the true interests of its various estates.

The preconditions for genuine modernization were created Peter's importation of Western science, architecture and fine arts, as well as creating a system of secular education. However, this only affected the small upper class. As a result, Russia was rent by a painful split between its medieval masses and Europeanized elite. The Slavophiles misunderstood this deep socio-cultural discord as a contradiction of the "true Russian" with the "foreign, Western" nobility.

This incomplete modernization became a chronic ailment of Russia's socio-cultural order. The tightening of serfdom under Peter became one of the main mechanisms for preserving of the medieval characteristics not only of the national economy and the structure of society, but also of the outdated, irrational way of thinking of the overwhelming majority of the masses.

[13] A. Gillenkrok, "Sovremennyye skazaniya o pokhode Karla XII v Rossiyu," *Voyennyy zhurnal*, no. 6 (1844): 69–70.

[14] N.I. Pavlenko, *Istoriya Petra Velikogo* (Moscow: Veche Publ., 2006), 477.

Medieval mental relics also persisted in the minds of the elite. One of these intellectual constants, shared by both noble and commoner, was the craving for freedom. The dream of freedom was the opposite of the submissive attitude of having to bow before the autocrat, although it was provoked and simultaneously driven into subconsciousness by the pressure of power. For a powerless commoner, freedom is a departure from all responsibilities: towards the state, society, family, laws, morality and even to some extent faith, since it enables one to ignore the Sermon on the Mount and the fear of punishment for mortal sins. The desire for freedom pushed the most reckless and desperate commoners to thievery and robbery. The letters of Kondratii Bulavin, who led the revolt in the Don, called on the "rabble," the Cossack "ragged," "atamans, highwaymen, thieves and robbers ... to walk, to drink and eat, to ride horses with him."[15] Popular revolt was the most extreme manifestation of the desire for freedom. This is what made it meaningless for the social order and merciless towards those who were seen to deny freedom.

The popular mind glorified those who came closest to freedom. Folklore celebrates the atamans-brigands, from the mythical Kudeiar to such real rebels as Stepan Razin and Emelian Pugachev, as well as strong-willed tsars. Ivan IV was not terrible but formidable, and Peter I was not the Antichrist of Old Believer legends, he was Peter the Great, largely because the arbitrariness of their rule clearly surpassed that of other Russian tsars.

The elite, which the sovereign endowed with some power over their "lesser" also sought to go beyond what was permitted by the law. The people's desire of freedom and the arbitrariness of the officials stemmed from the same mental source. It is not surprising that the "Fledglings of Peter's nest" of humble origin often surpassed noblemen in capriciousness towards those who in the lower classes.

It goes without saying that the Western concept of freedom that originated in the modern era as a set of rights and obligations within the framework of civil society, is very different from the freedom the Russian craves.

Corruption as an Element of Officialdom

There are many stories about arbitrariness and the tsar's attempts to fight against it associated with Peter the Great's reign. According to one of them, while hearing cases of embezzlement in the Senate, Peter the Great ordered Prosecutor General Pavel Yaguzhinskii to decree that the person who steals enough money to buy a rope from the treasury is to be hanged. Yaguzhinskiy replied with a smile:

> "Most merciful sovereign, do you really want to remain all by yourself, without any servants and subjects? We all steal. The only difference is that one person steals more and more blatantly than another."[16]

These well-spoken words had their desired effect. The emperor laughed and did not say another word.

Peter did not issue the decree. Moreover, was there any need for it? Already, in 1715 the military regulations systematized criminal law, introducing severe punishments for embezzlement, bribery and arbitrariness of officers and officials. In total,

[15] P.N. Milyukov, *Ocherki po istorii russkoy kul'tury. Natsionalizm i yevropeizm* (Moscow: Progress Publ., Kul'tura Publ., Redaktsiya gazety Trud Publ., 1995), 179.

[16] *Anekdoty i predaniya o Petre Velikom (Po Golikovu i dr.)* (St. Petersburg: Magazin M.M. Laderle Publ., 1806).

from 1689 to 1725, Peter issued 392 decrees to address problem, which testifies to his inability to prevent corruption.

Foreign residents constantly reported about embezzlement and bribes. For example, Weber, Brunswick's ambassador, wrote to his government that,

> according to a knowledgeable Russian, out of 100 rubles of taxes only 30 go to the coffers, while the rest is divided by the officials among themselves for their labors ... and although by the order of His Majesty many of them are eradicated, officials still find new ones at an amazing pace.[17]

Before 1710, there had practically been no high-profile cases of official abuse and embezzlement. However, in 1711 a new trend emerged. By the decree of 22 February 1711, Peter the Great established the fiscal department. According to the historian D.O. Serov:

> We can only assume that the tsar's decision to create a fiscal service might have been influenced by his fears about the population's tax capacity (the army's combat efficiency was heavily dependent on it). Meanwhile, illegal fees and bribes of local officials, that Peter I could not help but hear about, which had reached significant proportions, which threatened completely to disrupt his government's finances.[18]

At first Peter's good-natured and narrow-minded former teacher, N.M. Zotov, formally headed the fiscal department, which was subordinate to the Senate. However, for the first four years Zhelyabuzhskii was really in charge. The 24 provincial fiscal inspectors were subordinate to him, while the city fiscal inspectors reported to the former. There were four provincial fiscal inspectors in Moscow, and in St. Petersburg Zhelyabuzhskii managed two provincial fiscal inspectors – A.Ia. Nesterov and S.N. Shepelev.

According to Serov, by spring 1713, in addition to those in the new capital, there were 153 people in the fiscal department.[19] By the standards of the time, its staff was enormous, larger the two bodies of political investigation together – the Preobrazhenskiy Prikaz and the Secret Office (which was created due to deal with Tsarevich Aleksei in 1718). From the end of Peter's reign to the beginning of the Catherine the Great's, there were already 233 fiscal inspectors in Russia, and according to the decree of 23 November 1724, their ranks became equivalent to those from lieutenant to major general in the army.[20]

From the beginning, the fiscal authorities were to monitor the observance of laws and the execution of decrees. The decree of 17 March 1714 declared:

> apart from general supervision, the legislator gave the fiscal authorities the powers to initiate criminal cases and collect evidence on them, as well as to prosecute in court on behalf of the state.[21]

The Senate was highest legal authority, which complicated matters when their colleagues were responsible for rendering verdicts to senators.

The fiscal inspectors were already very busy from the very beginning. Between July and October 1713, Moscow's authorities submitted 107 cases to the Senate. They denounced

[17] N.I. Pavlenko, *Istoriya Petra* Velikogo, 490.

[18] D.O. Serov, *Fiskal'naya sluzhba i prokuratura Rossii pervoy treti XVIII v.* (Yekaterinburg: Ural'skiy gosudarstvennyy universitet Publ., 2010), 22.

[19] Ibid.

[20] I.K. Kirillov, *Tsvetushchee sostoyanie vserossiyskogo gosudarstva* (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1977), 338.

[21] Ibid., 24.

officials of various ranks, from the provincial chanceries to the highest levels, including Menshikov and Senators V.A. Apukhtin and G.I. Volkonskiy, who were under investigation for irregularities involving contracts to supply the army with guns.

Peter reacted to the fiscal authorities' zeal with a number of strict laws. The decree of 23 October 1713 allowed subjects to inform the tsar directly of embezzlement, bribery and arbitrary actions. In case of conviction, the informant was entitled to half of either the wrongdoer's confiscated property or the fine. The following year, the tsar's decree of 24 December threatened the embezzlers and bribe-takers with painful executions. But in practice, only lower and middle rank officials were quickly punished and often executed, whereas cases involving those at higher levels were often dropped. The Senate avoided deciding many fiscal cases. The denunciation of Moscow provincial fiscal inspector A.P. Liapin recorded:

> ...according to their fiscal reports... cases get delayed... And some who are to summoned to appear before court receive light punishments, or none at all.[22]

By 1714–1715, the fiscal institution already had a mixed reputation. Its inspectors were hated, often rightly because of false denunciations for which they were not responsible. Furthermore, they did not received a salary, but were paid with a share criminals' property or fines. Stefan Iavorskii, the Holy Synod's first head, once condemned fiscal arbitrariness from the church pulpit, for which the tsar scolded him. However, in 1714 the tsar issued a decree, according to which a fiscal inspector was to be punished for a false denunciation by the same fine that could have been imposed on a guilty party. However, if a person was wrongly denounced in error, the fiscal official would not be punished.

Aleksei Yakovlevich Nesterov, a fiscal official of humble origins, was notoriously zealous in investigating irregularities, earning the tsar's praise. Unafraid of noblemen, he informed on the head of the military department, Prince Iakov Fedorovich Dolgorukov, and his brother Grigorii. The former was accused pocketing the income of lands that did not belong to him, as well as that from supplying guns to the army, and illegal trade in glue. Meanwhile, Grigorii hid deserters and forced them to work for himself. However, the Dolgorukovs' merits in the sovereign's service forced Peter to ignore their infractions.

In 1714, Nesterov also produced evidence that his colleagues were too inactive, but Zheliabinskii told him there would be no fines because of their status as gentry. Indeed, there were cases of extortion and embezzlement by involving the latter himself, which resulted not only in the dismissal of Nesterov's own superior, but his own promotion to the post.

Shortly afterwards, 20 major cases were initiated. Prominent officials, including Senator G.I. Volkonskii (who hid deserters), merchant of the first rank in the capitals M.G. Evreinov and his son (who illegally sold tobacco in Siberia, with Governor Gagarin's approval), Astrakhan Governor A.P. Volynskii (who appropriated some 20,000 in government levies on merchants), as well as Siberia's governor, Prince Gagarin and his nephews. There were even suspicions of wide-scale embezzlement by His Serene Highness Prince Menshikov, for which the tsar ordered an investigation. However, the prince

[22] I.K. Kirillov, *Tsvetushchee sostoyanie vserossiyskogo gosudarstva* (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1977), 25; Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv drevnikh aktov (thereafter – RGADA), f. 248, op. 106, d. 393, l. 10.

had always treated Nesterov respectfully, and the official only informed on him when he detected that Peter's affection for his favorite were cooling, Furthermore, Nesterov only reported those offences of which the tsar was already aware.

Meanwhile, when he understood that reporting complaints against senators to the Senate would result in conflicts of interest, the tsar amended the relevant regulations by transferring the task to his newly created "major chanceries," composed of guards officers, he knew personally. While entrusting this task to military men without any legal training was contrary to modern European judicial practice, it was completely in the spirit of the patrimonial state, which made no distinction between military, judicial and other types of service. Since Peter did not completely trust his senators or fiscal officials, he hoped to turn the chancelleries into the "sovereign's eye," and personally punish any fiscal malfeasance.

This reform did little to solve the problem, and most senior officials guilty of irregularities got off lightly. Only a few were flogged or removed from office. As the story goes, the tsar personally beat Menshikov and threatened him with the gallows. However, according to the evidence, the prince was heavily fined instead. He had been under investigation from 1713 to 1725 for a number of misdeeds: including contracts to supply to fictitious soldiers while also driving up the price. If in 1710, Menshikov earned 15.6% of the commodity's cost to the treasure, by 1712 he helped himself to over 60% for some contracts, for a total income of 48,343 rubles. Since a contractor's profit was not to exceed 10%, in 1714 the prince was fined 144 788 rubles. Upon further investigation by Dolgorukov's chancery, it emerged that Menshikov had embezzled 1 018 237 rubles, a "fantastic" amount, as N.I Pavlenko put it. St. Petersburg's governor-general fined 1 163 025 rubles, but argued that he spent a great deal of state money on bribes at foreign courts and on spies in 1703–1709, which was impossible to verify. As a result, his debt was reduced to 324 354 rubles, which the tsar ultimately lowered to 162 177.[23] Throughout, Menshikov retained high ranks and positions, and kept them even until the emperor's death.

Prince Gagarin was the only prominent official to be sent to the scaffold. This account is based on the work of the early 20th century Siberian ethnographer and military historian G.E. Katanaev.[24] Gagarin had held the post of *stolnik* even during Tsarevna Sophia's reign. However, his career took off under Peter, who for a long time fully trusted him, as confirmed by his appointment to be Moscow's commandant in 1707, when the capital was threatened by the Swedes. Over the next two years, he became one of the richest people in Russia: He built residences in Moscow and St. Petersburg and kept an open house where 50 dishes were served for lunch. However, his star began to fade in 1710, when he was appointed to be Siberia's new governor.

Nesterov first reported in 1714 that Gagarin sold both his own goods and those of his friends to China as being from the state, to great profit. At the same time, the governor was also accused of restricting the China trade to his associates. His punishment was relatively light, and he was only ordered to send some relatives and friends back from Siberia. However, Nesterov continued the investigation, and in 1715 Gagarin was summoned to St. Petersburg to find out why the treasury had received such low taxes from Siberia in 1711. Although Dolgorukov's commission acquitted him, revenues from Siberia remained

[23] N.I. Pavlenko, *Istoriya Petra Velikogo*, 493–494.

[24] G.Ye. Katanayev, *Knyaz' Matvey Petrovich Gagarin. Sibir' epokhi Petra Velikogo* (Tyumen': Mandr i Ko Publ., 2005).

low and the investigation continued. By 1718, Gagarin had sent over 200 000 rubles, but 300 000 rubles in customs duties were still outstanding. While the investigation proceed through early January 1719, the prince continued to govern Siberia.

The documents portray Gagarin as a gifted and enterprising manager. A real product of his time, he never missed an opportunity to increase his own fortune. During his governorship, he built a stone Kremlin in Tobolsk in 1714–1715, and had the small town surrounded by a stone wall with towers. By order of the tsar, he was responsible for the Swedish prisoners of war who had been exiled to Siberia, and put some of them to work on the fortress, while others were sent to Okhotsk to build ships that would sail to Kamchatka. According to Bergholz's diary, Gagarin

> ...as they say, did a lot of good for the captured Swedes exiled there; in the first three years of his rule, he allegedly spent on them 15 000 rubles of his own money.[25]

In 1716, the governor ordered that the Tobol and Irtysh Rivers be joined by a canal. Meanwhile, in the early 18th century grave diggers had been raiding Scythian burial mounds. Pocketing some of the jewelry, Gagarin sent part of it as gifts to influential persons back in European Russia, including a parcel of gold items weighing 22 kg to Peter in 1716. In 1717, the governor issued an order that all the valuables found in the mounds were to be handed over to the treasury, although, undoubtedly, Gagarin still contined to take some of the riches.

Gagarin's embezzlement could hardly compete with the scope of St. Petersburg governor Menshikov, but the tsar punished the former more severely. In 1718, Peter the Great ordered Gagarin to arrive in the capital to participate in the trial of Tsarevich Alexei, but afterwards, now under investigation himself, he was again allowed to return to Tobolsk.

Gagarin was finally dismissed and put into custody on 11 January 1719. Major Likharev, who had arrived in Tobolsk, made a list of the prince's abuses. Not all of them were accurate and they included such false accusations as deliberately delaying diplomatic correspondence with China and managing expeditions abroad in search of gold mines for the tsar so poorly that most members died.

Gagarin's lengthy trial was completed in 1721. That year, in February Gagarin's servants were tortured to confirm their master's guilt – a formality, since all of the prince's estates and property had already been ordered confiscated. The following month, the former governor himself was put on the rack and tortured with fire. It was rumored in St. Petersburg that he denied his guilt, and Bergholz writes that the tsar was ready to pardon the prince if he confessed to everything. In fact, Gagarin's letter to Peter admitting his guilt and asked for pardon survives. During the investigation the prince also begged Menshikov and the tsarina to intercede.

Gagarin never betrayed the "accomplices and patrons," possibly hoping for a reprieve. This was not unrealistic, since the tsar had commuted his death sentence on Vice Chancellor Shafirov. In the event, the executioner did strike an ax, but he "missed," upon which the emperor's order to exile him to Siberia was read out. Ultimately, Shafirov was allowed to stop along the way in Nizhny Novgorod, where he ended his days.

[25] *Dnevnik kamer-yunkera F.V. Berkhgol'tsa. 1721–1725* (Moscow: Universitetskaya Tipografiya Publ., 1902), 71.

Prince Gagarin was publicly hanged in front of the Justice Board in the capital on 11 March 1721. His corpse continued to be suspended for over half a year as a warning to others – according to some reports, pecked all over by birds, the remains was transported from one street to another. On the day of the execution, the tsar, who had an inclination for the carnivalesque, hosted a "funeral repast" with orchestra and cannon for the prince's relatives.

Bergholz concludes his story:

> He was one of the noblest and richest grandees in Russia. His son is married to Vice-Chancellor Shafirov's daughter. This young Gagarin is now far from the position in which he was. After his father's death, he was reduced to sailor, and he also lost his entire fortune, because all of his father's large estates and property had been confiscated. The story of the unfortunate Gagarin can serve as an example for many; it shows the whole world the power of the tsar and the severity of his punishments, which does not distinguish a nobleman from a humble person.[26]

Peter the Great gave Gagarin's estates to one of those who tried him – Dmitriev-Mamonov, as well as to three more high-ranking people whom he still trusted; other officials were granted Gagarin's city houses. The edifying nature of Gagarin's trial was obvious, a lesson not only for the kamer junker.

It is not entirely clear why Gagarin had been chosen. He obviously cared for the work entrusted to him, which usually led to his master's indulgence, as was the case with Menshikov, Iakov, Grigorii Dolgorukov, and Musin-Pushkin. The latter was in the tsar's particularly good graces, who called him "brother." As a result, the brother was forgiven destroying three boxes of documents Nesterov had gathered for the Senate to prove Gagarin's guilt. Why did the Tsar punish only Gagarin? According to the *Notes* of the 19th century exile Prince Peter Dolgorukov's, there were rumors that Gagarin had been preparing a rebellion, hoping to rely on the Swedes towards whom he had been kind.

As with Tsarevich Aleksei, Peter could not forgive treason. Field Marshal Vasilii Dolgorukov, who defeated Bulavin in 1708 and commanded the Preobrazhenskii regiment in the Battle of Poltava, lost the tsar's grace when the latter suspected him of siding with his heir. Even before Aleksei's flight to Austria, Dolgorukov once told him:

> If the tsarina did not soften the sovereign's cruel disposition, we would not be able to live: I would be the first to betray.[27]

Fortunately for the field marshal, Peter did not know about this phrase, but he knew that the prince called the tsarevich, who believed he would be forgiven, returned to Russia and betrayed his assistants, "a fool who was persuaded by his father." For this he was sent to Solikamsk, deprived of ranks. However, he returned in 1724 on the occasion of Peter's coronation of his second wife, Catherine, and he was promoted to colonel.

The widely shared opinion that killing Aleksei was an unimportant episode is a profound mistake. The interpretation that Peter's decision condemn the tsarevich to a painful execution was characteristic of his cruelty, or that he was imitations Ivan the Terrible is equally off the mark. Aleksei was weak-willed and, although he did not like many of Peter's actions, the tsarevich was completely incapable of leading the opposition to his father. Little is known about Aleksei's views. His sympathy for the masses

[26] *Dnevnik kamer-yunkera F.V. Berkhgol'tsa. 1721–1725* (Moscow: Universitetskaya Tipografiya Publ., 1902), 71–73.

[27] P.N. Milyukov, *Ocherki po istorii*, 180.

can be summed up in a naive phrase: "I only wish the rabble would be healthy," and his political plans, as whispered to his beloved, Afrosinia, boiled down to:

> I will remove all the old (his father's closest aides – *author's note*) and choose new ones of my own free will. I will live in Moscow, and make St. Petersburg an ordinary city. I will not keep ships. I will keep the army only for defense, and I do not want to go to war with anyone: I will be content with the old territories.[28]

But since he was the heir, many pinned their hopes on Aleksei. In addition to the small circle of his own friends, members of the highest elite also secretly opposed him, including some prominent princely families like the Golitsyns, the Kurakins, and the Dolgorukovs, as well as a number of foreigners in Russian service and even some Peter had promoted "from below."

This was no traditional court faction; on the contrary, his opponents formed, as historians put it, the "party of Westerners." Their understanding of Europeanization was at times deeper than Peter's superficial and external imitation of the West. They disliked Peter's lifestyle with his rude entertainments such as the wedding of dwarves. Above all, they did not like the methods, pace, forms and, most importantly, the goals of Peter's actions. In their opinion, the sovereign's proper tasks, as suggested by Prince Vasilii Golitsyn during Tsarevna Sophia's reign were not to impoverish the people, especially the nobility, and to act with the advice of at least some of the leading nobles. Such had been the political practice of the Zemskii monarchy of Mikhail Fedorovich, as well as the autocracy of Aleksei Mikhailovich the Meekest and his son Fedor III.

Members of this "silent opposition" served as generals, diplomats, courtiers, and senators, but they hoped that all would be well again when Tsar Aleksei's eponymous grandson acceded to the throne. A dozen years after the death of Peter the Great, Johann Gotthilf Vockerodt, a secretary of the Prussian embassy to Russia, wrote about the case of the tsarevich. Describing the conversations of Peter's opponents with his heir, he reported that they told him: "Although your father is smart, he does not know people, and you will know smart people better."[29]

After Aleksei's execution, Peter's suspicion of his inner circle deepened. He therefore kept the Secret Office he had established to investigate his heir, which was headed by the trusted Peter Tolstoi, who had been promoted from the minor nobility. It operated in tandem with another institution charged with political investigation, the Preobrazhenskii Prikaz, whose personnel were selected by nobleman Fedor Romodanovskii.

Meanwhile, by 1722 Peter grew disappointed with the fiscal service, which had not only failed to sweep away corruption, but, as Nesterov's investigation showed, was itself not free from bribery itself. Therefore, he also established the prosecutor's office as a counterbalance to the fiscal service. According to his decree of 12 January 1722, "The Prosecutor General and the Chief Prosecutor must be in the Senate. At any College there will also be a prosecutor who will report to the Prosecutor General." As for the latter, the decree of 27 April 1722 stated: "...this rank is like our eye and the solicitor of state affairs." The to fill the post was Pavel Ivanovich Yaguzhinskiy. The son of a Lithuanian organist, he had begun his career as a page to F.A. Golovin. Having enrolled in the in the Preobrazhenskii Regiment in 1701 he was an orderly of the tsar, who discovered diplomatic talents.

[28] P.N. Milyukov, *Ocherki po istorii*, 181.
[29] Ibid., 180.

Yaguzhinskiy's first major investigation was the case of chief fiscal official Nesterov, who was arrested in November 1722. Tried under torture, Yaroslavl provincial fiscal inspector Savva Poptsov was the first to testify. Quite possibly falsely, he claimed that his chief had demanded regular bribes. Documentary evidence also emerged of the official's bribery: To help Larion Vorontsov's appointment as governor of Siberia, he had charged him 500 rubles. By the end of the investigation, it turned out that the chief inspector had diverted some 300 000 rubles from the treasury. Furious, Peter ordered Poptsov, Nesterov and several other fiscal inspectors brutally tortured, and in January 1724 condemned all of them. He reserved the most excruciating death for Nesterov, who was broken by the wheel (Hitherto unknown in Russia, this painful form of execution had been one of Peter's European imports.)

It is most likely that Nesterov fell victim to political intrigues. Shortly afterwards, as a result of the struggle of various elite clans, Shafirov was exiled. It is clear that in both cases, as with Gagarin, the accusations of corruption were only a pretext for eliminating those who had lost factional battles, as well as a spectacle of intimidation on the part of the emperor. In any case, these trials had no effect on corruption.

Why was Peter the Great, so decisive and quick at reprisals, who issued 392 decrees on the fight against corruption, so inconsistent in the fight against bureaucratic arbitrariness, bribery and even embezzlement? The reason is that such misdeeds were deeply embedded in the culture of Muscovy's patrimonial regime. These crimes had existed long before they were first recorded in Tsar Aleksei's law codes in the 1650s, and were punishable by death. Even earlier, at the end of the 15th century Tsar Ivan III received petitions from his subjects accusing governors of acting "like greedy wolves." But the central government invariably turned a blind eye, since it knew that the treasury did not have the money to pay its officials adequately, especially those in the provinces. As Muscovy's official lexicon put it, the service of the governors was "selfish" (*korystnoy*). They did not receive any salary or additional land, taking part of the taxes "for food" (*na kormlenii*) instead. A governor also had the right to receive offerings both when taking and leaving office, as well as a special tax on the proceedings he conducted. The latter created excellent grounds for bribes and arbitrariness. The central government believed that its agent had the right to take from the people what it did not give him. Its poorly paid staff in the capital had its own informal means of income, bequeathing to folklore such colorful phrases as "to drag out" (*tyanut' volokitu*), "lead by the nose" (*uyti s nosom*), "to graft higher than your rank" (*brat' ne po chinu*), and "the tsar favors, but the hunter does not favor" (*Zhaluet tsar, no ne zhaluet psar*), etc.

The development of a money economy and salaries for clerks and some of the military (after 1653, most foreign officers) did not reduce extortion and abuse, especially by high-ranking noblemen – resulting in a number of revolts in middle of the 17th century, including the Moscow rebellion of 1648, many other urban risings, and the Copper Riot of 1662, as well as streltsy grievances against the arbitrariness of their chiefs. *The Diary of General Patrick Gordon* also reports about corruption among government clerks. This Scotsman entered the Russian service as a captain in the early 1660s and at first could not receive his full salary, despite the tsar's decree and the intervention of the boyar who headed the foreign office. The latter twice beat the pay clerk in front of the Scotsman, but the problem was eventually solved when foreigners who had spent more time in Russia explained that the man should be given a small bribe, which was informally seen as the norm. When Gordon followed their advice, he immediately received his salary.

Judging by the fiscal service's documents, corruption rose under Peter the Great. Although this can partly be explained as a continuation of the old service tradition and the state's habit of "forgetting" to pay salaries on time, it was also provoked by Peter the Great himself, who forgave those who, judging by the evidence of contemporaries, were loyal to him.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, corruption was critical for maintaining the loyalty of Russia's service elite. The practice made it possible to reward officials without touching the treasury, and, at the same time, provide legitimate grounds to punish those who had fallen out of favor or were deemed disloyal. Meanwhile, denouncing bribes, embezzlement, and legal arbitrariness became an important weapon in factional struggles and career advancement. Peter was loath to curb such conflicts, since they made it easier for him to control his elite.

Conclusion

During the 18th century, bribery, arbitrariness, embezzlement, and bickering among the elite played the same role that mestnichestvo had earlier. Having long been an aspect of the interaction between the tsar and his service elite, they proved a useful way for the ruler of a country that was superficially Europeanized, but still largely patrimonial, to keep his officials in line. Without them, as well as without tightening the grip of serfdom, the Petrine apogee of the old Russian autocracy would have been impossible. Peter the Great's reforms did not destroy the patrimonial structure characteristic of the Muscovy between the 15th and 17th centuries. His success in westerning science, high art, and the education of the elite opened the way to modernity in other spheres of Russian life, but this only happened after his death.

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